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AUTHOR Nash, Claire
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ABSTRACT

This guide is intended to help persons employed in the hotel and catering industry to improve their customer relations skills. The following topics are discussed: the importance of customers and good customer relations in the hospitality industry; what customers want; what employees in hospitality occupations can give customers; and importance of seeing things from the customer's point of view; the importance of first impressions--appearance, posture, and expression; greetings and offers of help; ways of finding out what customers want; the importance of making the effort to offer more than is requested; strategies for dealing with difficult and happy customers; the importance of knowing the answers to questions commonly asked by customers; the importance of getting things right; ways of dealing with snags and hitches; techniques for recognizing when customers are dissatisfied; and procedures for coping with customers' complaints. (MN)

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MAKING LIFE HAPPIER

FOR CUSTOMERS AND STAFF

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HCITB

Hotel and Catering Industry Training Board
PO Box 18, Ramsey House, Central Square
Wembley, Middlesex HA9 7AP, UK

Design and illustrations by Pat McNeill,
Kingsnorth, Ashford, Kent
Text by Claire Nash, St Albans
Printed by The Hazell Press, Wembley

Dear Colleague

This book is for you.

It's to help you enjoy your job more and to remind you how we should treat our customers.
Please read it carefully. Think about its suggestions and try to follow them in your work.
Obviously, a book cannot deal with everything that happens in real life. So, if you have any questions or suggestions about our company's customer relations - the way we treat our guests - have a chat with your supervisor.
When you have read the book, I hope you'll see that good customer relations make sense for the customer, for the company and for you!
Your management does its part. Please try to do yours.

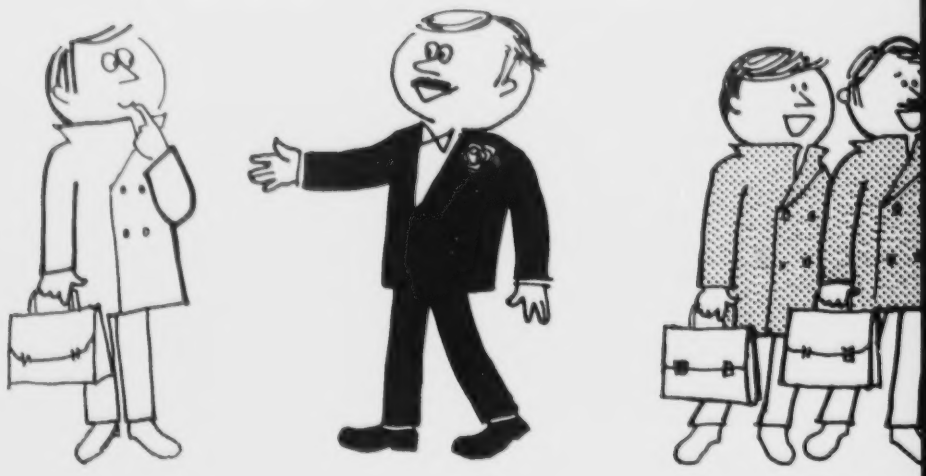
Thank you

the Manager

CUSTOMERS

You need customers .... so does your company.
It's so obvious. But it is sometimes forgotten!
Without customers, your company would probably not exist.
Without customers, your job would probably not exist.
Without customers, your life would be different - it might not be very good at all.
Depending where you work, customers are also called: guests, clients, visitors, the public, punters and tourists.
Whatever they are called, they are the people who use the services and facilities of the place where you work.
Anyone could become your customer one day.

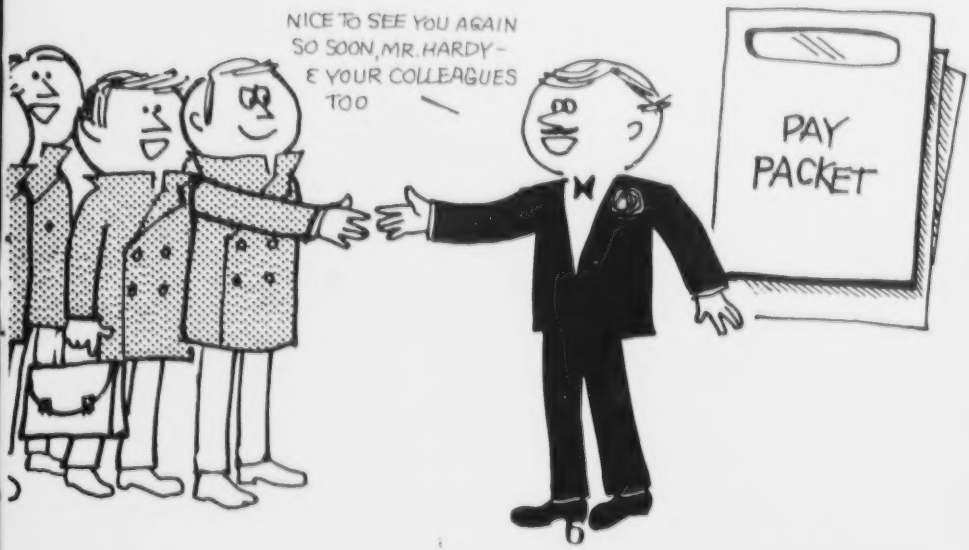
CUSTOMERS + GOOD CUSTOMER RELATIONS



CUSTOMER RELATIONS

You need customers. So you need to help keep existing customers and encourage new ones.
How? By doing your job well. Customer relations play a very large part.
Customer relations are about people - you and the customers.
Customer relations involve treating customers and potential customers well - by being polite and pleasant at all times - and bringing about the things that customers want.
It is partly a matter of what you do and say and how you do it when you are with customers. (You may have heard this called customer contact.) It is also a matter of doing your behind-the-scenes work properly so that everything runs smoothly.

= MORE BUSINESS + GREATER JOB SECURITY



WHAT CUSTOMERS WANT

Every customer wants something slightly different. (There's more about this later in the book.) But here is a list of things that many customers say they want. Tick the things that you can bring about in your job.

- ☐ A warm welcome
- ☐ Competitive prices
- ☐ Rapid attention to requirements
- ☐ Twenty-four hour service
- ☐ High hygiene standards
- ☐ Politeness and pleasantness
- ☐ Attention to individual requirements
- ☐ Good value for money
- ☐ Night life
- ☐ A wide menu choice
- ☐ A feeling that the company cares
- ☐ Good security measures

Can you see now that you can bring about many of the things customers want?
You cannot do everything, of course! Your job may not, for example, involve setting menu prices. And you'd need the help of colleagues to provide 24-hour service.
But you have a crucial part to play. You are important.

WHAT YOU CAN GIVE

Customer relations are about you and the customer. You can bring about many of the things that customers want. So customers need you. You are important to them. You are also important because you represent the company. To customers, you ARE the company. They may not know - or want to know - much about company policies, finances, number of establishments, the top people. They may or may not have contact with your colleagues. But they have contact with you. So you represent everything about the company - its standards of courtesy, service, efficiency and caring. It's up to you what impression they get of the entire company. And that's important!
Ever tempted to question what you get out of customer relations? Read on. You'll know by the end of the book.

IN CUSTOMERS' SHOES

You represent the company whenever you are on duty. What impression do you create?
Think of the times when you visit a restaurant, shop, office, hotel, club, bar or theatre. Have you ever experienced anything like this?

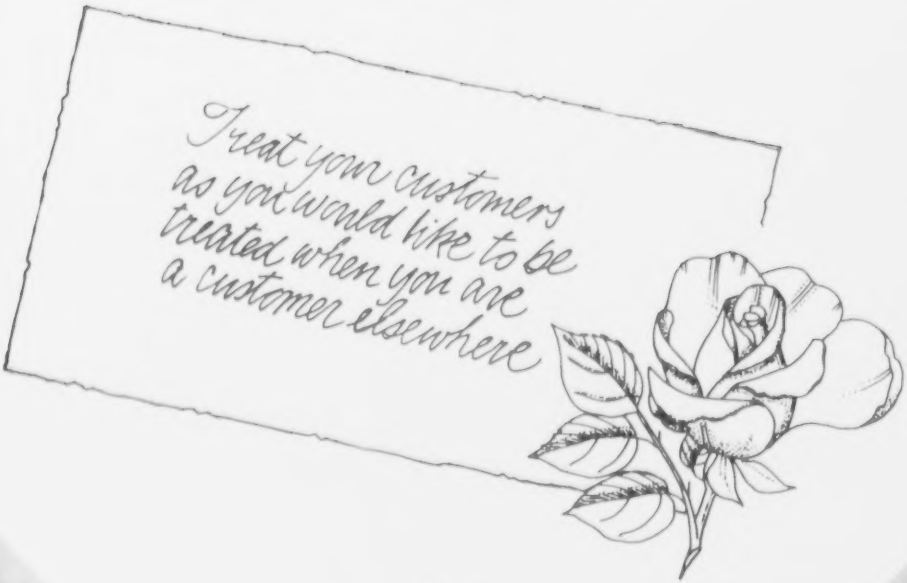
- ☐ Just one look at the staff put me off the place. I was kept waiting for ages - and no one even apologised.
- ☐ The staff were so deep in their own conversation that I had to interrupt them to get any service.
- ☐ They just didn't care about me. Every other guest seemed more important.
- ☐ The staff were "switched into automatic". They didn't even look up at me.
- ☐ They made me feel so awkward that I left.

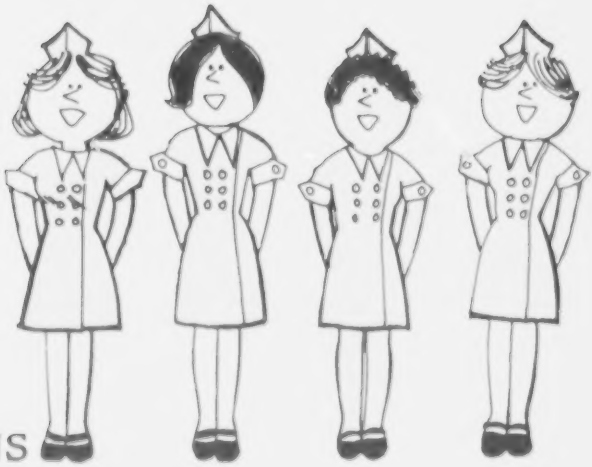
Can you remember how unpleasant it was?

Now put yourself in your customer's shoes to try to see yourself as they see you. What impression do you think they have?
Look at the list again. Do you think your customers have ever felt any of those things because of you?
It's a shocking thought, isn't it?
The golden rule is: treat your customers in the way that you would like to be treated when you are a customer elsewhere.

MEMO BOARD

- You need customers.
- Customers need you.
- You are important
- Customer relations concern people - you and the customer.
- Customer relations involve treating customers well and bringing about the things they want.
- To the customer, you are the company.





FIRST IMPRESSIONS

First impressions count. They can tempt people to sample your company's services. Or they can drive potential customers away. Customer relations start the moment someone considers coming to your company.
Your management does its part in providing equipment and facilities, by deciding policies and by organising the way things are done. But a great deal of responsibility lies with you. You are important.
We do not know everything about the tiny elements which make up our first impressions of people. Researchers are still working on it.
But we do know that your appearance, the way you move or don't move and the look on your face all play a part.
We also know that the way you welcome and offer to help customers are crucial.

APPEARANCE

You don't need fancy clothes or a handsome face or figure to look good. It's far more important to look

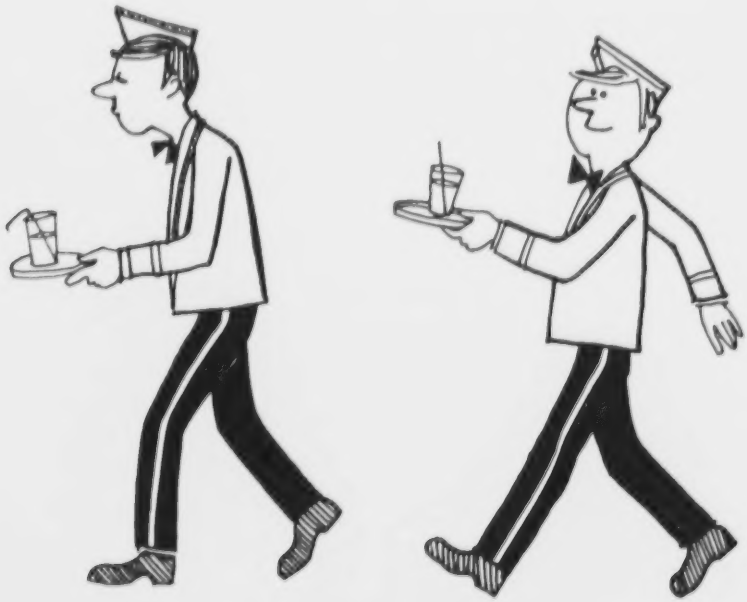
clean, tidy, efficient and pleasant - throughout your time on duty.

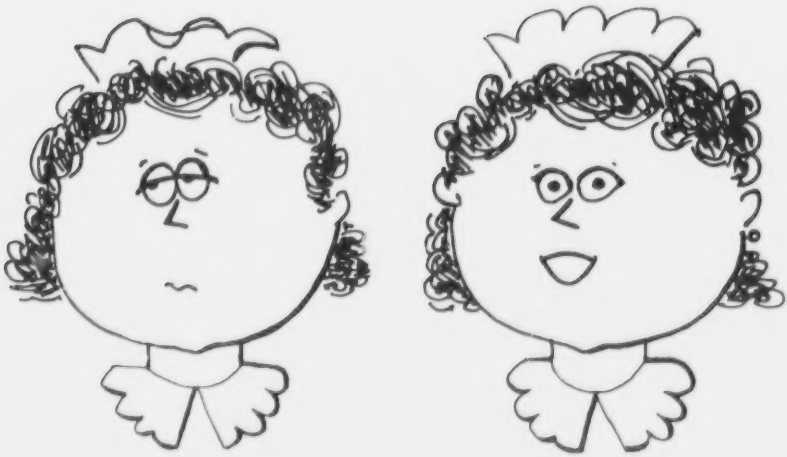
Observe careful personal hygiene - for your whole body.
Remember that your face and hands will be particularly noticeable. So keep them clean.
Don't bite your nails.
Don't put on make-up like concrete.
Get rid of tell-tale nicotine stains.
Keep your hair clean and tidy. Keep your hair covered if you handle food. Wear any headwear that the company provides.
Don't forget any of the little things that are a part of a uniform, such as gloves, scarves, ties, badges.
If you do not have a uniform, ensure that you are dressed appropriately for your job. And that includes shoes!
Keep clothes clean and pressed. Keep a special watch on the cleanliness of collars and cuffs.
Any problems? Have a chat with your supervisor.

POSTURE

It may seem incredible at first, but the way you sit, stand, move or don't move all influence the impressions customers have of you.

They also help to create the atmosphere of the place. A good posture is alert and comfortable. A good posture makes customers feel welcome and at ease. It makes them feel that the company cares.
Controlled movements always give a better impression than rushing, fussing, fidgeting or twiddling.
Try and see yourself as your customers see you. Is your posture welcoming? Do you look efficient?





EXPRESSION

The look on your face tells customers a lot about your attitude and feelings. Your mouth and eyes are the most expressive.

Smile!

It may be the most important thing you do all day.

It is almost impossible to feel fed up or look disinterested when you smile.

Smile!

You could make a customer's day brighter.

There's little point in saying something like: "Have a nice day" if your expression tells the customer that you really couldn't care whether they have a good day or not.

Use your eyes. Look at customers. Catch their eye occasionally. There's no need to stare or gaze at them! Just show that you are paying them attention.

GREETINGS AND OFFERS OF HELP

Your first comments play a vital part in creating customers' impressions.

A friendly voice and message will not cost you a great deal of effort. But they will help earn you happy, satisfied customers. Make each customer feel that he or she is important.
Greetings include "Hello", "Good morning", "Good afternoon" and other welcoming comments.
Offers of help allow you to start bringing about the things customers want.
What you say depends on your job and the circumstances at the time.

Some companies instruct staff such as receptionists, telephonists, waiting staff and uniformed staff in a standard form of greeting and offer of help. If you have one, write it here:

.....

.....

It is important to make customers feel welcome and to offer to help even when they open the conversation.

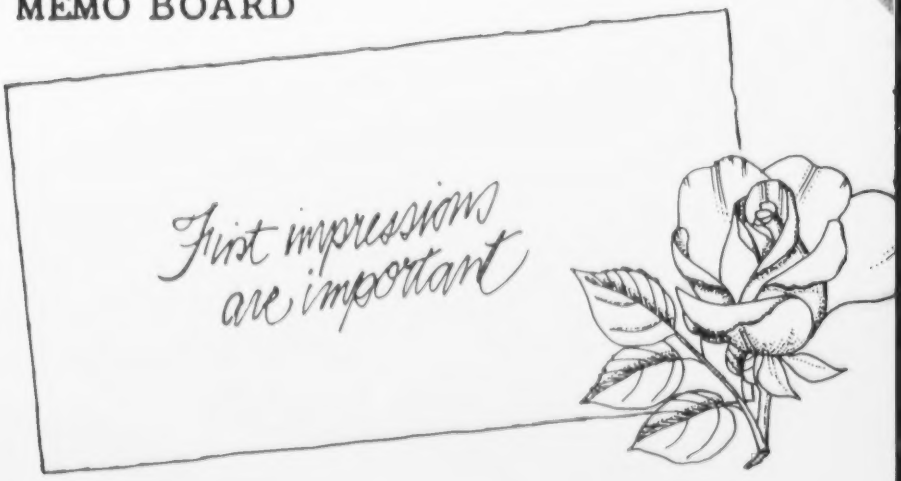
Customer: "Any cheese sandwiches?"

Counter Assistant: "No. Sorry. But you could have a cheese roll or cheese salad instead. What will it be?"

You know that what you say depends on the circumstances and your job. But how you say it remains the same, whatever you say:

- Look at the customer.
- Smile!
- Ensure that you look ready to help.
- Sound friendly. Try to make the customer feel comfortable and welcome. Show that you care.
- There is no point in saying one thing and sounding as if you mean something else. An off-hand, bored or sarcastic tone of voice could be disastrous.

MEMO BOARD



- The impression you create could help turn a casual customer into a regular - or drive the customer away.
- You and your clothes must be clean, tidy and appropriate.
- Your posture and the expression on your face can welcome people or put them off.
- Suitable greetings and offers of help make customers feel welcome and at ease.
- If you know a customer's name, then use it.
- An offer of help allows you to start bringing about the things customers want.

FINDING OUT WHAT CUSTOMERS WANT

Every customer requires something slightly different.

You need to find out so that you can bring it about. This is the key to successful customer relations. You may have heard the skills involved called determining and meeting customer needs or satisfying customers. These expressions mean the same as finding out and bringing about the things customers want.
How do you find out what customers want?
By watching, listening and asking.
As you go about your work, keep your eyes and ears open for clues about things customers may want.
Keep in touch with your customers. Give them the chance to talk to you if they choose. (But never force your conversation on them!)
It gives customers the chance to ask for things and to talk if they want. And it gives you a chance to bring things about, offer things they had not thought about, and even, to put things right if there are problems.

OFFERING MORE

You have probably noticed that some customers seem unsure about what they want. They take ages to reach a decision, they keep changing their minds, or they miss out on something they would probably enjoy.
It's up to you to help.
Tell them what is available. After all, they are not mind-readers.
Describe things. Whenever you can, explain the advantages or benefits of the things on offer.
Offer alternatives. Don't let customers feel that there's nothing for them.
Your job is more than service with a smile. It also involves selling or gaining extra business. In a way, it is part of the skill of service because it gives customers the chance of more or better things.

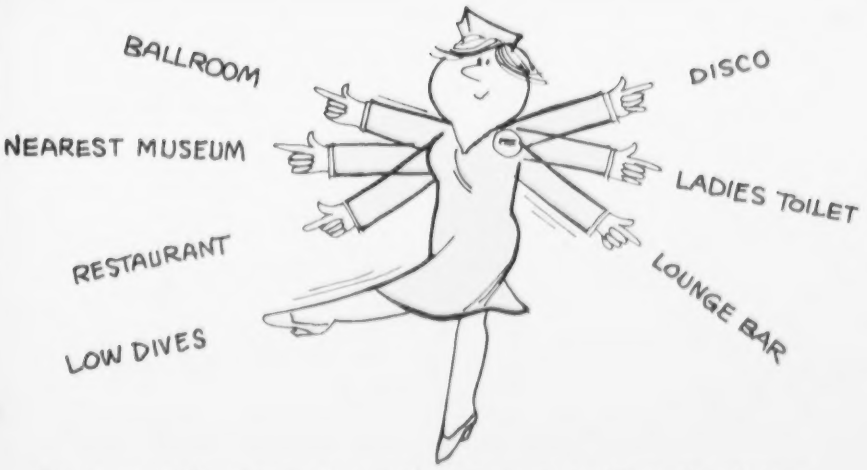
MAY I TEMPT YOU TO AN INTRIGUING LITTLE MUTTON BROTH, MR MAYHEW...?
Soup of the Day
Toad in the Hole
Kipper Mornay
Tuna Flambé
Sausage Toad
Toad Chantilly

DIFFICULT AND HAPPY CUSTOMERS

An awkward customer? We all know that they exist. Ones who want the world!
They are sometimes unreasonable, unfair or wrong! But you can never reveal your real feelings in such circumstances. Be polite - even if the customer is not! Watch, listen, ask. Find out what would satisfy them and try to bring it about. Try never to lose your temper. Just think: the customer may have had a rotten day. It may be nothing to do with you or the company. But you can help make the day pleasant. Not everyone has that chance in their work. It is one of the special aspects of your job.
Fed up because you are having a difficult day? Happy, satisfied customers usually make your day happier and easier. So, it is also in your interests to give customers a pleasant day.
Remember: you have the power to make customers' visits into a memorable occasion, whether the visit is for a celebration, a holiday, a business meeting or a very simple meal. Don't waste your power.

KNOWING THE ANSWERS

Information is high on the list of things that customers often want.
They expect you to know answers to their questions.
You must know all the answers to all the questions that concern your own job and your own department.
You must also have clear answers to regular questions about general aspects of your company's services and facilities.
Are there any questions you are often asked but never know the answer to? Then find out! Don't let yourself and your customers down.
Stuck for an answer? Never say: "I don't know" and leave it at that. Endeavour to find the answer or bring in a colleague who can help.
Good customer relations involve knowing how to help customers even if you cannot help them yourself.



Do you really know the right answers? Tick the things you should know in this list. Make a list of the other important things you should know about.

- ☐ Type and cost of menu
- ☐ What ingredients different dishes/cocktails contain
- ☐ Guest room facilities and charges
- ☐ Conference and meeting room facilities and charges
- ☐ Optional extras (eg. microphone, folding bed)
- ☐ Leisure facilities
- ☐ Availability of services and facilities (eg. restaurant opening hours, room service times, children under 12 not admitted to the solarium alone)
- ☐ Where to find .... (eg. bar, lounge, toilets, public telephone)
- ☐ Local entertainment
- ☐ Public transport
- ☐ Details of special functions
- ☐ Details of bargains/special offers (eg. meals midweek, weekends)

Don't forget! Your company needs information too - about guests' requests, things they enjoy or don't enjoy, complaints, things that would make your life easier. Your information will help the company to help you in your job. And that will help bring about even more of the things that customers want.

GETTING THINGS RIGHT

There's no point in finding out what customers want unless you get it absolutely right.

Taking a reservation or booking? Then read out all the crucial details and ask the customer whether they are correct. Customers can put you right if necessary - and change their minds if they want!
Giving information? Avoid jargon and complicated explanations. Always check that customers have all the important details like dates, times and prices.

Checking the validity of cheques, credit cards or identification documents? Check thoroughly, but as quickly as possible to avoid delays. If necessary, explain that it is company policy to check everyone's documents. If you need to make a telephone call to check details, apologise for the delay and explain that it is routine procedure.
Passing on a message? Then get it absolutely right!
Got all the details correct? Then make yourself busy!
There's no point in getting the details right unless you carry out the job correctly - one hundred percent!

MEMO BOARD

- Find out what customers want and bring it about.
- Watch. Listen. Ask. Anticipate what customers want.
- Let customers know what is available and describe the advantages or benefits.
- Offer alternatives.
- Help make customers' days into pleasant ones - it is in your own interests too!
- Learn the answers to questions affecting your job and department.
- Learn about general aspects of your company.
- Check that the information you give is clear.
- Check the accuracy of details that customers give you.

SNAGS, HITCHES AND HICCUPS

The best forms of customer relations prevent situations where customers are likely to complain.

You can help by:

- doing your job to the best of your ability at all times
- finding out and bringing about the things customers want
- watching out for potential problems and stopping them
- keeping customers informed at all times
- apologising - in advance, when possible - for delays.

But even in the best-run businesses, things sometimes go wrong and guests complain.
There are many possible causes for customer complaints. They frequently include situations where:

* staff fail to do something properly
* customers are kept waiting
* staff forget to do something
* equipment or supplies are broken, damaged or missing
* someone forgets to pass on crucial information or instructions
* staff misunderstand what the customer wanted
* the customer misunderstands what is available/possible
* the customer expects something (a service, facility or standard of service or facility) which the company does not usually provide
* the customer feels that he or she is not getting good value for money.

Have you ever been responsible for causing any of these?

A GOLDEN CHANCE

Dissatisfied customers complain because they want things put right.

But not all dissatisfied customers bother to complain. They just don't come back. And you probably never know why.

Whenever a customer complains, you and your company have the chance to keep rather than lose a customer. (You need customers, remember!)

No one really enjoys dealing with complaints. But remember; it is better to be able to deal with a complaint than to lose a customer altogether.

Whatever you do, don't panic!

Some customers can be rather frightening when they are angry. Just remember that they want you to calm them down and put things right. They are not necessarily blaming you.

Even if you are to blame, don't panic! Remember: it is more important to put things right than to wriggle out of an awkward situation.

If your company has policies for dealing with complaints, make sure that you follow them.

IF A CUSTOMER COMPLAINS

Don't get in a tizz. Follow these simple steps.

1. Listen carefully

Pay attention to the whole story. You need to know exactly what the problem is.
Don't interrupt: you could jump to the wrong conclusion.
Allow the customer to let off steam. It will make the discussion easier.
If it is possible to move out of other customers' hearing, do so diplomatically.

2. Apologise

Show that you take the complaint seriously. Show you care that the customer is upset - even if you think the complaint is unfair or unreasonable.
Always make the apology a general comment.
Never blame a colleague by name. Never blame a particular department.
Some of the things you might say are:

"I am sorry that this has caused you problems/ inconvenience/upset."
"I am sorry you feel this way about it."
"I can see your point of view. Please accept our apologies."

Make a point of thanking the customer for bringing the complaint to your attention. It shows that you really do care.

3. Decide

Someone in the company has got to put things right. Is it you?
The answer will depend on your job, the amount of

authority you have, the company's complaints policies and the circumstances involved.
You must decide very quickly whose job it is to sort out the problem.
You may have to call in a senior member of staff from another department. Or you may have to deal with the problem yourself.
If it is your job to deal with the complaint, then take action. Don't try to pass the buck!
If you think it is someone else's job to sort out, tell the guest that you are contacting a colleague. Then explain the situation to the colleague. Don't make the poor customer go through all the details again!
Get the customer and your colleague together. Never try to get rid of a complaint by saying something like:

"It's not my job,"
or: "It's X department's responsibility. You'll have to take it up with them."

Remember that the customer has brought the complaint

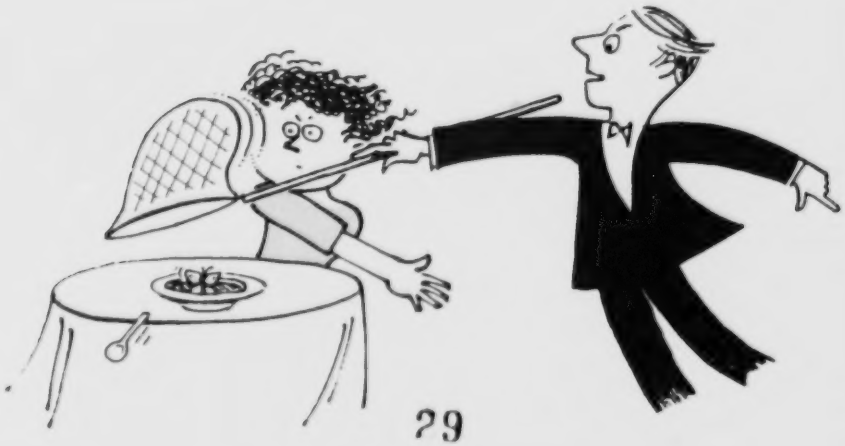
to you. You must deal with it yourself or help a colleague to deal with it.
Uncertain what to do? Check with your supervisor or a senior staff member.

4. Find the solution

Find out how things could be put right and agree a course of action with the customer before any action is taken. Otherwise, there could be more complaints later! Sometimes you will have to offer customers alternative courses of action.
Beware of promising to do something that the company cannot carry out. If necessary, check with your supervisor or a senior staff member before suggesting a course of action to the customer.
Never break any company rules in order to resolve a complaint. It will only store up trouble for the future.

5. Take action

When you have agreed the course of action with the customer, make sure you carry it out!



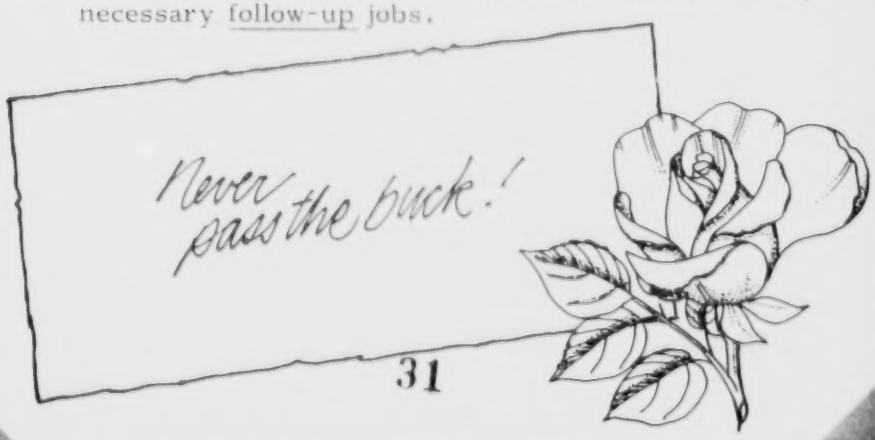
It's easy to say you will do something. The important part is to do it.
Explain to the customer what you will do, so that he or she knows what to expect.
Keep the customer informed. Reassure the customer that the situation is receiving attention.
A delay or snag? Change the course of action if necessary.
Remember that the most important thing is to bring about what the customer wants.

6. Follow up

When you have carried out the action, check with the customer that everything is now satisfactory. Carry out any further necessary tasks.
As soon as you feel that the customer is happy, take suitable action to ensure that the problem will not happen again. This may involve doing some jobs yourself, or it may mean reporting the problem to a senior member of staff.
If your company has a complaints record book, make sure that you fill it in.

MEMO BOARD

- Prevent complaints before they occur. Stay alert. Act promptly.
- If a customer complains to you, it is your job to sort it out or to help a colleague deal with it.
- It's better to have to deal with a complaint than to lose a customer for ever and never know why.
- Don't panic. Follow the complaints steps.
- Listen carefully to what the customer has to say.
- Apologise for the inconvenience and upset and thank the customer for bringing the problem to your attention.
- Decide whose job it is to sort out the problem.
- Find the way to put things right and agree it with the customer.
- Act promptly to put things right.
- Check that the customer is satisfied. Carry out any necessary follow-up jobs.



The Helping Hand Series is published by the Hotel and Catering Industry Training Board. Each book has been designed as an easy to read and remember handbook for all members of staff.
Colourful illustrations, often humorous, support the important messages of the text. The books are each 28 pages in length, printed on high quality paper, A5 size.

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THERE'S A CALL FOR YOU. This is a book for everyone who picks up the telephone at some stage during their time at work. Effective use of the telephone is important - for staff, for customers, for the company.

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